

General Lucius D. Clay

Biography

GEN Lucius Dubignon Clay was born in Marietta, Georgia, in 1897. He graduated from the United States Military Academy, and was commissioned in the Engineers, in 1918. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he served as an Instructor at the Academy and held a succession of civil and military engineering posts directing the construction of dams and civilian airports. Throughout his life, GEN Clay was known for disciplined work habits, long hours, and often refused even to stop to eat. In 1942, he was the youngest General Officer in the U.S. Army. During this period, he gained a reputation for bringing order out of chaos. Although he did not hold a combat command during World War II, his skill in engineering and organization paid huge dividends for the ultimate success of the European Campaign. His actions in stabilizing the French port of Cherbourg were instrumental in the effort to support operational formations. In 1945, he was appointed to serve as Deputy to General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower and subsequently held the post of Deputy Governor of Germany during the interim Allied Military Government. From 1947 to 1949, GEN Clay was the Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation Zone in Germany during which time he directed the research and completion of 'A Report on Germany' which became one of the source documents for "The Marshall Plan" that assisted in rebuilding war-devastated nations across Europe. His efforts were characterized by thoughtful and humanitarian aims. It was in his capacity, as Military Governor, that he faced one of the biggest challenges of his life. On June 23-24, 1948 the Soviets imposed a blockade on all rail and highway lines in and out of Berlin. Two days later, GEN Clay gave orders to begin an air resupply operation that would become known as the 'Berlin Airlift'. The massive logistical effort, lasting 324 days, was a complete success. GEN Clay's work not only ensured that supplies reached the city, it also pointed the way to future German-American cooperation and partnership. His collaboration with German civilian leaders in founding the state of West Germany won him acclaim as an American "founding father" of the Federal Republic of Germany. GEN Clay passed away in 1978. His grave, in the Military Academy's cemetery, bears as simple stone donated by the citizens of Berlin: "We thank the preserver of our freedom."

